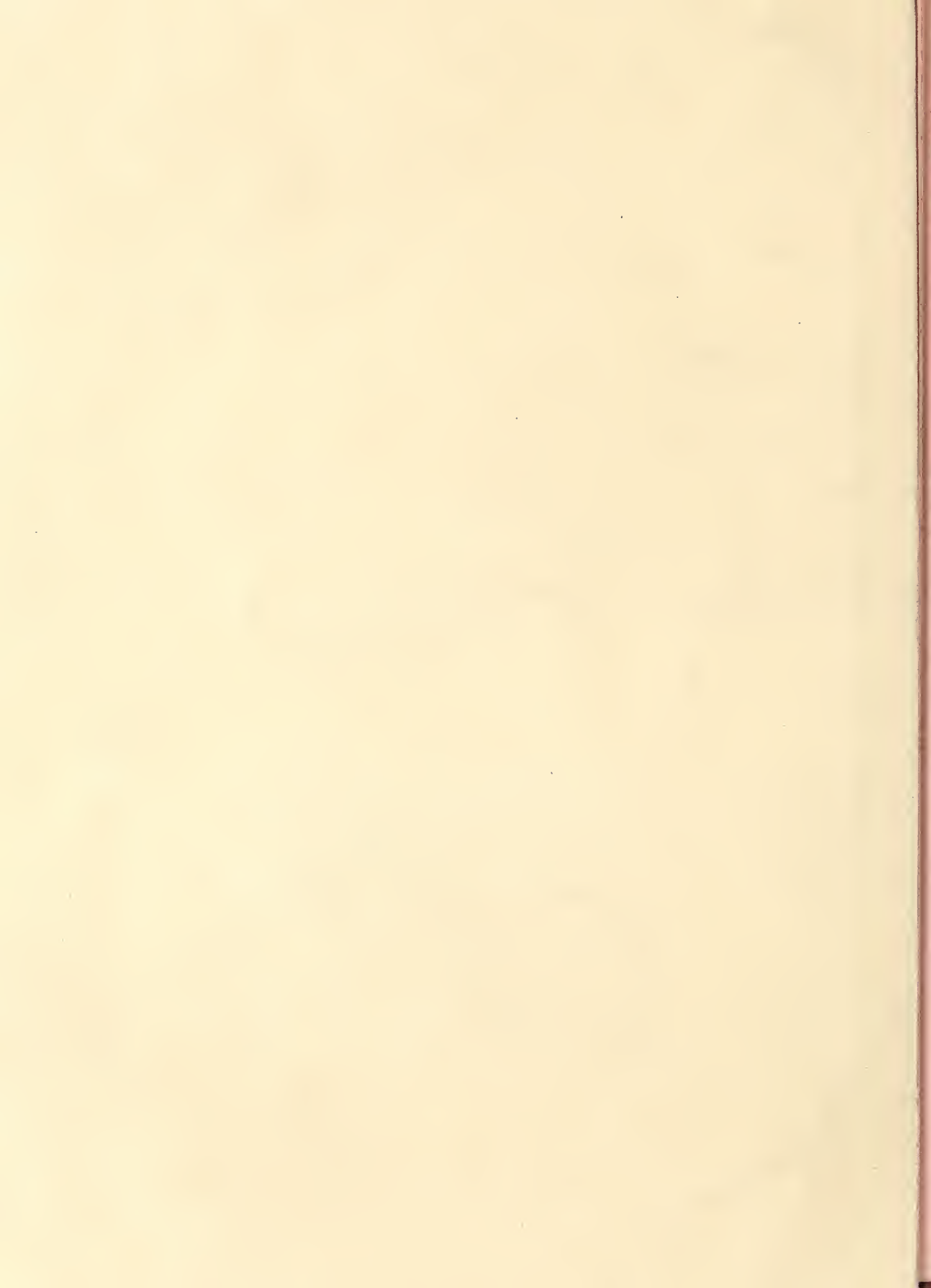


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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, January 12, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BUYING SHEETS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publication available, Farmers' Bulletin 1765-F, Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels.

--ooOoo--

Every housewife expects the sheets and other household textiles she buys at January white sales- or any other time of year, for that matter,- to give good service. How is she to judge quality? She wants durable sheets, but a lot of sizing can make a sheet look heavier than it really is. She wants sheets that fit her beds, but sometimes an alluring package may contain a skimpy sized sheet. As yet, manufacturers are not putting all the facts on the labels that the buyer would like to find there.

The Bureau of Home Economics has put a number of good buying hints in one of its recent publications- Farmers' Bulletin 1765-F, Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels, which is free while the supply holds out. In case you do not get a copy while the white sales are on, I'll summarize them briefly for you now.

It is often impossible to compare two sheets in price, says the Bureau, because they belong in different classes, and are used for different purposes. One sheet may be heavy durable muslin intended to withstand the wear and tear of romping boys, and the other may be a soft, smooth, fine fabric suitable for a guest room or a gift. Sheets can be classified into five groups- light, medium, and heavyweight muslins, fine counts, and percales. Within each class, prices may be compared, of course. A good sheet in any of these groups is firm in weave, is practically free from sizing, is torn rather than cut from the bolt, and is hemmed with strong thread and short even stitches (about 12 or 14 to the inch). The better grades of sheets are made from cotton ranging from about 1 to 1-1/4 inches in staple length. Short- and medium-length fibers are used for the lower qualities of sheets. Twisting binds the fibers and holds them in place. It also adds to the strength of the yarn and makes the fabric more durable.

How helpful it would be if every sheet carried a tag or label giving us information on the points which assure us of good quality! For instance, if it told how many threads to the inch both warpwise and fillingwise, how many pounds pressure were required to "break" the fabric, what the material weighed per square yard, and the amount of sizing. I, for one, like also to know the length and width of the sheet without having to get out my tape measure. I want my sheets large enough after they are washed. I always tuck the under one in firmly on all four sides of the mattress, so it will be smooth and unwrinkled when I lie on it, and I want the upper sheet to be the same size in order to tuck in well at the foot of the bed and fold generously over the blankets and other covers at the top, to protect them from soil.

It's not hard to find out about size, fortunately. And while we're on the subject I might as well add that for general household use, sheets 99 or 108 inches long (torn length, before hemming) are the most satisfactory. Standard width for a single or twin bed is 63 inches; for a twin or three-quarter bed, 72 inches, and for a double bed, 81 or even 90 inches. Bargain sheets are often too short and too narrow.

"Thread count" is one of the facts I'd like to see on the label. Thread count means the number of yarns to the inch both up and down and across. The number of warp or lengthwise yarns is usually given first. There should be about as many yarns in one direction as the other to make a well-balanced fabric. In general, sheets with a low thread count are coarse and sleazy. Muslin sheets satisfactory for everyday use have a finished thread count ranging from about 70 to 80 in the warp and from about 61 to 70 in the filling. Fine percales can be expected to have a high thread count.

Weight per square yard is not an infallible guide to a sheet that will wear well, because good durable sheets are made in many different weights. If you are paying for laundry by the pound, very heavy sheets run up the laundry bill. They are also more difficult to launder at home. Mediumweight sheets run between 4 and 4-1/2 ounces to the square yard.

Another indication of wearing quality in a sheeting is breaking strength. To determine this property a textile expert uses an instrument that registers the number of pounds required to break a piece of the cloth. Since the greatest wear in actual use and laundering comes on the filling yarns, it is important that the fillingwise breaking strength should be satisfactory.

When a sheet is labeled a "first" or a "standard quality", this means that it is practically free from weaving imperfections, such as uneven yarns, or thick or thin places. Also, every filling thread runs unbroken, from selvaige to selvaige. Seconds may contain some weaving defects and imperfect yarns. Just how many flaws a second may have depends on the standards set up by the mill that manufactured it, for as yet no definite regulations for grading sheets exist in the industry.

Naturally one expects sheets marked other than firsts to be sold at lower prices. If you buy seconds or run-of-the-mill sheets, examine them carefully to see what the defects are, - whether they will make the sheet wear poorly or simply affect its appearance before laundering.

Some sizing on the warp yarns is necessary to keep them from breaking in the loom, and a little sizing on the fabric makes it more attractive and does no harm, but sometimes large amounts are used to fill up a poorly woven fabric and make it appear heavier. When a sheet is labeled "pure finish" it means that only the warp yarns were sized before weaving.

Other points to look at in a sheet are the selvages- whether they are firm and reinforced; the hems, which should be turned evenly and closed at the ends, with fine even stitching throughout; and if the sheet or hem is colored, whether the color is guaranteed fast. Practically all the tests for quality in sheets hold good also for pillowcases.

